

Daily Press Briefing: Discussion of Venezuela

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June 5, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Today, the Secretary is meeting with the Venezuelan Foreign Minister. I wondered if you could say which side called for that meeting.

MS. PSAKI: Well, I believe in our background briefing we did with the traveling road show, they confirmed that it was the Venezuelans who asked for the meeting. Just to confirm for everybody, the Secretary will meet with Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua on June – today, I should say – today, on June 5th. He will talk about the U.S. Government's interest in building a functional operational relationship with Venezuela. And our interest in establishing a productive and functional relationship with Venezuela based on mutual interests, including counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and commerce. And I believe that meeting is either about to happen or are happening, as we speak.

QUESTION: Staying in Venezuela, the filmmaker Tim Tracy – did you guys accept the meeting before he was released or after?

MS. PSAKI: Well, the Secretary was prepared to discuss his case during the meeting. In terms of the tic-tock of the timeline of when we accepted it, I believe it was sometime last week, but it was an issue he was prepared to discuss.

And can also confirm, of course, as you all have seen, that Mr. Tracy has been released. We are pleased that he will be reunited, of course, with his family. We also want to thank the fine work of Venezuelan Charge Ortega and our Embassy in Caracas in getting to this moment.

QUESTION: So is he – do you know where in the world – is he still there or is he --

MS. PSAKI: No. He's either en route or back.

May 31, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: I have one other follow-up, which is quite – probably easy, Venezuela.

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Is there any update on these two guys?

MS. PSAKI: Not since yesterday. There's still – of course, as I mentioned yesterday, we are cooperating – embassy security personnel is cooperating with Venezuelan authorities. We have been in touch with these two individuals. I don't have another update in terms of the conclusion.

QUESTION: All right. Do you know – if and when there is a – well, presumably there is going to be a conclusion to this – can you – is it possible to let us know within the bounds of what you can say about Chief of Mission personnel, if those two – the two individuals involved in this incident are still in the country and are still – or if they cease to become or they cease to no longer – they cease to be under COM authority?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have an update on that.

QUESTION: No, I know, but can you --

MS. PSAKI: I'm happy to check. I'm happy to check. They are DOD personnel, as you know, but I'm happy to check on that.

May 30, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Maybe you've seen reports of tensions between Venezuela and Colombia after Enrique Capriles, the losing presidential candidate, visited President Santos. Do you have a comment on that?

MS. PSAKI: I have seen those, but I just don't have a comment from here on that.

QUESTION: Besides bi-national relations, Venezuela threatened to withdraw from its role of the peace process with the FARC that Colombia has been having, which you have supported. Would you have a concern in that happening, maybe Venezuela derailing the process?

MS. PSAKI: Well, I don't want to speculate on that. Let me just say broadly, to your point, that, as we've said previously, we welcome and support efforts by President Santos and the Colombian people to pursue the lasting peace and security that Colombia deserves. We don't – the United States is not a party to these negotiations, so we refer you to both parties to discuss further.

QUESTION: And even more broadly than – there's been reports about infighting between the Chavistas in Venezuela. After this thing with Colombia, do you feel that there's instability or a threat of instability coming from Venezuela?

MS. PSAKI: I just haven't seen those reports that you're referencing, so I'll have to look a little more closely at them.

QUESTION: Your colleagues from the Embassy in Caracas, what's the latest on the investigation? Is it correct or are these stories correct that this may have been a fight between the two of them and not between some disgruntled other patron or employee of the establishment in question?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have anything on that for you. There is an investigation looking into the details of what happened here. I just want to reaffirm that there's no indication that either of these individuals were involved in any illegal activity, but I refer to, of course, the authorities on the ground who the Embassy is working closely with to make a final conclusion.

QUESTION: Sorry, when you say that there's an investigation, you're referring to the Venezuelan criminal investigation?

MS. PSAKI: I'm referring to not an investigation of their wrongdoing; an investigation of the details of what happened.

QUESTION: Is there – the incident, no, but is there – are you aware if there's an investigation by either the State Department, because these people came under Chief of Mission status, or the Defense Department into what they were doing?

MS. PSAKI: I'm not aware of that, but Embassy officials are working closely with Venezuelan authorities on working toward achieving the details and figuring out the details.

QUESTION: Yes, but I think you said you were going to take the question as to whether they were in a zone that was recommended to keep out of. Anything on that?

MS. PSAKI: I think we sent something out, so let me just repeat this for you, the Embassy's travel policy, which we put out publicly, as you know, and is broadly applicable to all citizens living in any particular country or community. It's divided into three zones, so yellow, orange, and red. The area in question was an orange zone, and the Embassy recommended that – recommends that U.S. direct hire personnel and their families assigned to U.S. Embassy in Caracas do not travel to orange zones between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

May 29, 2013

Jen Psaki, Spokesperson

**Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC**

QUESTION: Do you have any update on the incident in Caracas Patrick --

MS. PSAKI: I do.

QUESTION: -- was talking about yesterday, on the condition of the people injured in Caracas, who they were and what they were doing in Caracas?

QUESTION: What were they doing?

MS. PSAKI: Well, we can confirm that two employees of the Defense Attache Office of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, one civilian and one uniformed service member, sustained, as Patrick confirmed yesterday, non-life-threatening injuries -- they were gunshot wounds -- during an incident at a nightclub in Caracas at approximately 4:00 in the morning on May 28th.

QUESTION: Sorry, a follow-up to that?

MS. PSAKI: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Within your advisory to State Department employees that are based in Caracas, you do have certain areas that you refer them to go -- that you think that it's okay for them to go to and other areas that you recommend that they don't. Do you know if this particular establishment where they were shot outside of is in one of the areas that the State Department embassy security prefers that employees not go to?

MS. PSAKI: We have no information that leads us to believe that. I'd have to look into it further. Broadly speaking, we do -- and this doesn't exactly address your question, but I just wanted to add to it that this is a case where, obviously, the specifics are still being looked into, the details around the incident, of course. Broadly speaking we of course hold any employees representing the United States, no matter where they work, to a high standard. But we'll let the final details of the process work themselves through.

QUESTION: Just to follow on that, do you have any insight into motivations for the shooting, or will there be an investigation? Will the U.S. cooperate with Venezuelan authorities on that?

MS. PSAKI: I don't have any more details. They are looking into the details right now, so as those become available, we may or may not have more. Just to --

QUESTION: Any further characterization of what they did at the Embassy as military attaches, especially the civilian? The uniform function might be more clear.

MS. PSAKI: I don't. I would send you to my friends over at the Department of Defense.

QUESTION: Sorry. Do you mind taking the question about whether – I mean, I think it's understood --

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I'm happy to.

QUESTION: -- where the shooting was, the location of where they were shot. Do you mind taking the question whether --

MS. PSAKI: Sure. I'm happy to take the question.

QUESTION: -- it's in an area that is advised not to go to?

MS. PSAKI: Absolutely.

QUESTION: Thank you.

QUESTION: One more thing on it. So the narrative here is that they were not seriously injured, correct? And it's been --

MS. PSAKI: Non-life-threatening.

QUESTION: Non-life-threatening, so --

MS. PSAKI: Unless you're a doctor.

QUESTION: So they're non-life-threatening, which we could assume they are able to talk and it's been more than 48 hours since this happened. Have -- has anybody in this building gotten a story from them about whether they thought they were targeted, or this was random violence?

MS. PSAKI: I just don't have any more specifics for you. As I mentioned, this is obviously something that is being looked into, in cooperation. Embassy security personnel is cooperating with Venezuelan authorities to do that. And as we have more to say, I'm sure we'll say in response to your questions.

May 28, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Can you just clear up what happened in Venezuela overnight with the two members of the – or two Embassy staffers? Tell us what happened.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah. We can confirm that two members of the U.S. Embassy in Caracas were injured during an incident early this morning. Medical staff inform us that their injuries do not appear to be life threatening. Embassy security and health unit personnel are at the hospital and have been in touch with the two individuals and their families, but we have no further details to provide at this time about the incident.

QUESTION: Well --

QUESTION: It occurred at the Embassy?

QUESTION: -- can you say how they were injured?

MR. VENTRELL: I don't have any more information about the extent of their injuries, other than to say that they're – we don't believe they're life threatening at this point. This did not happen at the U.S. Embassy compound. This was offsite.

QUESTION: Yes. Can you be more explicit?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, all the details of this – we're still taking a look at it. I don't have any more information to provide to you at this time.

QUESTION: What kind of – did it happen – where did it happen?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, my understanding is that this was at some sort of social spot or somewhere outside of the Embassy grounds. But in terms of the exact location of it, I don't have any details on that.

QUESTION: A social spot? You care to be a little bit more – like a drinking establishment?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not aware if – I'm not sure if it was a restaurant or a nightclub or what the actual establishment was, but that's why we're in touch with both our personnel and --

QUESTION: Was it, in fact, a strip club --

MR. VENTRELL: I have no information --

QUESTION: -- in Caracas?

MR. VENTRELL: -- on the site, Matt, one way or another.

QUESTION: How about the rank of the staff?

MR. VENTRELL: Just that they were Embassy personnel. I don't have further details at this time.

QUESTION: Were they Foreign Service -- or are they Foreign Service officers, or are they other --

MR. VENTRELL: No, my understanding is that they are other agency personnel, not from the State Department. But if we're able to confirm later in the day more about their status, we'll do that for you.

QUESTION: But again, you said that injuries are non-life-threatening?

MR. VENTRELL: Non-life-threatening.

QUESTION: What kind of injuries? Were they stabbed, shot?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, again, as we look at the details of the incident -- let's wait till we have more information about both the location and the exact circumstances of this incident.

QUESTION: Has anybody been arrested for their --

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware of, but in instances like this, we are in contact with local authorities, which is a standard operating procedure for us overseas. Okay?

May 23, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: The U.S. is following some situation going on in Venezuela where some reporters' recordings are being broadcasted related to government officials? And now it is said today there's going to be a second recording coming. Is the U.S. is following all these kind of scandal in Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, we do watch the situation closely in Venezuela. I don't have a particular -- particular information about this recording of --

QUESTION: It's a recording they open in all the media regarding the government in Venezuela that created a scandal during the last three days.

MR. VENTRELL: We are watching the situation closely.

May 15, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Let's go a minute to the Western Hemisphere, especially in South America, some countries. There are some problems of dialogue, and also some pressure to the press from the governments. I want to know if the U.S. is following some rumors about intervention in Argentina to some media that sometimes is opposite to the government, harsh comments from the Government in Venezuela, in Ecuador. How is the U.S. following all these cases?

MR. VENTRELL: We follow press freedom across the hemisphere. It's something that is part of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. It's something that we care about deeply and in terms of the balance of power between different branches and the freedom of the press. These are issues that we raise across the hemisphere consistently. I don't have a specific reaction for you country by country, but this is something we work toward broadly.

QUESTION: Related to the dialogue in Venezuela, is the U.S. interested in inviting some of the opposition in Venezuela to come here to have some conversations – talking about Capriles? Are you inviting, probably in the future, him to the United States to talk? Because there is no dialogue in Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not aware of an opposition visit to the United States at this point, but we maintain a wide range of contacts in Venezuelan society.

May 9, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Yesterday in the building, there was a Council of the Americas.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: And the Vice President Biden and also the Under Secretary for the Western Hemisphere Roberta Jacobson talk about Venezuela and the need of dialogue.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah, yeah.

QUESTION: I want – Maduro has been visiting some countries like Uruguay, Argentina, and also he's going to be in Brazil. I want to know if the U.S. is worried that Maduro is creating a new bloc of countries that are not interpreting – making an interpretation of this message – politically talking – that is the reason – necessity of dialogue in Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: I'm not sure that – again, and I refer you to the Vice President's remarks. I can't possibly improve on them; they were very good. But in terms of our relationship with the countries in the hemisphere, we pursue them with our friends and with all countries in the hemisphere, and we pursue them, and we're not concerned as people, as countries look at their various bilateral arrangements or multilateral arrangements. We engage widely and have a robust relationship with our Latin American partners.

QUESTION: Yeah, but if you see the picture of some countries that are invited to the White House, you will see, for example, that yesterday was observed that the Chilean President is invited to the White House, the Peruvian President is invited to the White House, Mr. Biden is going to Brazil and Colombia, and there are some countries there in South America that are not being visited. And the question is if you see the picture that it seems that some countries that aligned maybe in the UNASUR with the Maduro position and the U.S. is talking more with other countries. It's not – the picture looks –

MR. VENTRELL: We pursue a collaborative and cooperative and positive relationship with our partners across Latin America. And this – some of these visits and these engagements really underscore our commitment to Latin America in this Administration.

May 2, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: Well, yeah. Just briefly, I wanted to know if there's any update on the situation in terms of your dealing with the Government of Venezuela, President Maduro. We went on at length about this yesterday. I'm just wondering if there's any – if you have any changes or clarifications that you want to make to --

MR. VENTRELL: Matt, I just want to make it clear that what's really important – and this is important for the Venezuelan people – is that the 7 million people who voted for the other candidate have their issues and their concerns resolved. And so in terms of working with the Venezuelans, the Venezuelan people have to have confidence in their institutions and the results of these elections. And so that's something we've been very concerned about, and we're continuing to push for this process to go forward, but in terms of this is something that's got to be resolved through the Venezuelan institutions and it's for the Venezuelan people to decide.

QUESTION: Because shortly after you said what you said yesterday, which was in essence that you're dealing with this government as if it was the legitimately democratically elected – or this president as the legitimately democratically elected, the opposition came out and said that they're going to go ahead and continue to demand a full recount.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, and they should continue to go ahead and demand the full recount, and that's something that we've consistently said should go forward. In terms of your parsing a hypothetical to me, are you – if they were as the legitimate – I mean, my only --

QUESTION: No. It's not a hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: Matt --

QUESTION: No.

MR. VENTRELL: There's a hypothetical in there, but let me clarify. Let me clarify, Matt.

QUESTION: Well, I defy you to tell me what the hypothetical is in that question.

MR. VENTRELL: As if they were.

QUESTION: You're treating them as if they were. That's not a hypothetical at all.

MR. VENTRELL: The point is that --

QUESTION: You're -- the question is are -- do you accept that President Maduro is the legitimately democratically elected president of Venezuela. There's no hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: And our --

QUESTION: Just because the words "as if" are in there doesn't mean it's a hypothetical question.

MR. VENTRELL: Let me restate it more clearly then, Matt. The Venezuelans have to make that assessment. And there are 7 million people who voted a different way, who still have concerns, who want them resolved, and the opposition is continuing to work through that. We continue to support the need for looking at all the irregularities, for looking at a full recount. And so that's what we continue to support.

In terms of the day-to-day bilateral relationship, yes, we do continue to have our Embassy there and have quote/unquote a "bilateral relationship." But this isn't about recognition. It's the Venezuelan people who have to decide about the legitimacy of their leaders.

May 1, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: What is your reaction to the beating of the opposition legislators in the Venezuelan National Assembly after the decision of the president of the assembly to deny them the right to speak until they recognize President Maduro, and how will it affect your evaluation of whether or not to recognize Maduro's government, which has also refused a recount that you have requested?

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for the question. Let me state clearly, violence has no place in a representative democratic system and it's particularly inappropriate within the National Assembly. We're deeply concerned by the violence that occurred, express our solidarity with those injured, and again urge all parties to refrain from acts and attitudes which contribute to physical confrontations. And as I said this just earlier this week here from this podium, but the rights of all Venezuelans, including their elected representatives, to assemble freely and speak their minds and convictions are essential components of democracy as defined and agreed to by consensus in the Western Hemisphere in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. So we've been pretty clear about this going back, and I reiterate it again today.

In terms of the vote recount issue, we've said that it's the prudent and essential approach to do a prompt, transparent recount in an inclusive manner to look at the vote count to help build confidence among the Venezuelan people. And our understanding is that some of that is still going on, but it's working its way through the Venezuelan system.

QUESTION: So are you going to delay the decision of recognizing or not the government until that is taken care of, or solved, or has --

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we don't sort of recognize governments. We have a bilateral relationship with a country and that bilateral relationship continues. But we've said that it would generate more confidence among the Venezuelan people if a full recount and an investigation of the irregularities can go about.

QUESTION: Right. But usually, the governments are recognized, and Secretary Kerry had said that they would withhold this until they know what happened with the election.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, that was in a particular moment when the opposition hadn't decided the way forward. They said that – and the government agreed – to look at a recount after the inauguration, which they are doing through their process. But the bottom line is there's not this sort of sense of legal recognition, where we say you are recognized as the sovereign leader of a country. We have a bilateral relationship with the government and that bilateral relationship continues.

QUESTION: Well, do you think that the government is legitimate and do you regard – whether the word is “recognize” or not, do you regard Maduro as the lawfully and legally elected president of the country?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, that's for the Venezuelan people to decide in terms of the legitimacy. But we continue --

QUESTION: No, it's not. It's up to the Venezuelan people to decide what you think of him?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, no. We – I'm saying --

QUESTION: No. You have your opinion, and that's what I want to know.

MR. VENTRELL: And Matt, I --

QUESTION: I don't care what you – whether – what the Venezuelan people did or did not do is immaterial to my question.

MR. VENTRELL: All right.

QUESTION: What I want to know is does the United States regard – not recognize – regard Mr. Maduro as the legally, lawfully elected, democratically elected president of Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: We continue to have our bilateral relationship with this government, which is led by Mr. Maduro. And so he is --

QUESTION: So there's no – you can't answer that question yes or no?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, there's no break in relationship. He's now --

QUESTION: I'm not asking if there's a break in relationship.

MR. VENTRELL: Right.

QUESTION: I'm asking if you – if the United States government considers Mr. Maduro to be the legal – the legally elected, democratically elected president of Venezuela.

MR. VENTRELL: We work with Mr. Maduro as – and his government – as the government in place running affairs in Venezuela. In terms of generating greater confidence in the vote outcome, we thought that it was good for the Venezuelan institutions and for the Venezuelan people to pursue that and to look into irregularities so that – what's really at stake here is that the Venezuelan people have faith in their institutions and in their government.

QUESTION: I understand that. But it sounds to me like the answer is yes, you do believe that Mr. Maduro was legally elected president of Venezuela because you're still working with him and his government.

MR. VENTRELL: We are still working with him and his government. It is up to the Venezuelan people to decide whether it was a legitimate election and was done so according to their standards. And that's why they're looking at it, and that's why the opposition called for a reexamination of what happened, and we want that to happen in their institutions.

QUESTION: So you still are going to wait before you confer whatever kind of recognition it is that --

MR. VENTRELL: Look, it's just – it's not for us to put --

QUESTION: I know it's not for you --

MR. VENTRELL: -- a stamp of approval one way or another on their electoral process. It is for us to work with the government that's in place on mutual interests of concern, which we need to on bilateral interests that we have in common and we need to work with.

QUESTION: But you routinely comment about the transparency or credibility of elections in countries that are not the United States.

MR. VENTRELL: And Matt, at the time, we expressed our concerns about the irregularities.

QUESTION: I understand that. But you are – at this moment, you are working with Mr. Maduro as if he was the newly elected president of Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: Yes.

QUESTION: All right.

April 26, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: U.S. citizen Timothy Hallett Tracy has been arrested. There are charges that he is a spy for the U.S., that he received funds from a NGO tied to the U.S. Government. Have you been able to – the consulate has been able to talk to him at all? And what is the latest on – from your side?

MR. VENTRELL: So we are aware of the arrest of a U.S. citizen in Caracas. We're seeking further information from the Venezuelan Government on the case, and we're seeking consular access to the detained individual. Because of privacy considerations, we're unable to comment on this specific case further at this time.

But let me just say that these type of accusations are the latest in a series of allegations made by the Venezuelan Government in recent weeks against a variety of, quote/unquote, "foreign actors" suggesting efforts to affect political developments in Venezuela. These allegations have not been substantiated. The U.S. continues to categorically reject any allegations of U.S. Government efforts to destabilize the Venezuelan Government or to harm anyone in Venezuela. So again, we're still looking for more information about this specific case, but that's the broad sweep of the pattern that we've seen.

QUESTION: But there's no link between Mr. Tracy and any U.S. Government agency?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, this is about an arrest of a private U.S. citizen.

April 24, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: President Maduro was happy with the comments from the podium yesterday about sanctions being considered and he's announced that the – that Venezuela has appointed a new charge d'affaires in Washington in hope for a better relationship with the United States. Do you have a reaction either to the appointment or to his comments that Venezuela, under his leadership, wants a better relationship with the United States?

MR. VENTRELL: Right. Well, as you know, Shaun, with all bilateral diplomatic relationships, it's important to establish effective channels of communication between governments so we can discuss matters of mutual concern. The Venezuelan decision to send Calixto Ortega as their charge d'affaires of – in charge of the Venezuelan Embassy here could be a step in that direction. He's known and is a respected participant in the Boston Group, which was a bipartisan group of legislators from Venezuela and the United States established back about a decade ago to discuss bilateral relations.

So we have had historical ties with the Venezuelan people – historical, human, and cultural ties – and we believe it is important and timely to establish a productive relationship based on mutual interests, such as counternarcotics, counterterrorism, the energy relationship, the commercial relationship. So that's really where we are in terms of our relationship with the Venezuelans.

QUESTION: Where are you in terms of your assessment of the election? There have been calls for a recount or an audit. Do those calls of the United States still stand, or are those --

MR. VENTRELL: We do continue to believe that the ongoing CNE recount and a thorough review of alleged voting irregularities will – is important and essential to ensure that the Venezuelan people feel that their democratic aspirations are being met and that they have greater confidence in the election outcome.

QUESTION: Patrick, on that, just out of ignorance more than anything, does the U.S. have a charge in Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: We do have a charge d'affaires.

QUESTION: He never left?

MR. VENTRELL: My understanding – I think we may have a different charge d'affaires now, but let me check on that.

QUESTION: But I mean, it's been staffed, in other words?

MR. VENTRELL: We've consistently staffed the charge d'affaires position, but I'd have to check for you on who he or she is at this moment.

April 23, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Foreign Minister, Minister Jaua, was threatening countermeasures if, as was asserted, the United States imposes sanctions on Venezuela. To begin with, is there any effort on the part of the United States, any proposal to impose any type of sanctions? And what's your general response to this?

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware at this time. I'm not sure exactly what he's referring to. But I'm not aware of any particular effort afoot in terms of sanctions in Venezuela at this point.

QUESTION: So there's no – that's not something that's under consideration?

MR. VENTRELL: Not that I'm aware of, no.

QUESTION: I think he was – there was a report that was quoting the Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, Roberta Jacobson, as being quoted talking about the consideration of sanctions.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah, I think this was a specific interview she had given. But I think her position was not indicating one way or another in that interview. I'd have to go back and look at the transcript, but that's my understanding.

QUESTION: Wait, how can she not indicate one way or another whether she was considering it? Like, by nature, you are considering it if you have been talking about it.

MR. VENTRELL: Right. Let me clarify. My point is I think the Venezuelan side may have looked at that and read into we're considering something, and I'm saying that that's not something that we're currently contemplating at this moment.

QUESTION: Sanctions?

MR. VENTRELL: Sanctions.

QUESTION: As was just mentioned, the Foreign Minister suggested that Venezuela might respond to this perceived threat by stopping oil sales to the U.S. Do you have any reaction to that threat?

MR. VENTRELL: I hadn't seen that specific threat. But we have continued to have our economic and commercial relationship with Venezuela despite some of the ups and downs of the relationship over time. And that's one area that we said we're looking to improve potentially with the Venezuelan Government going forward.

April 16, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: So what do you make of the fact that they went ahead and certified the result without a full recount or a full audit? What do you make of the violence that has ensued?

MR. VENTRELL: So, Matt, as we noted yesterday, given the very close results, opposition candidate Henrique Capriles and a member of the electoral council, the CNE, as the – it's referred to, called for a 100 percent audit, a recount of the results. Ruling party candidate Maduro also endorsed this idea. And we said yesterday, a full recount would be important, prudent, and necessary in ensuring that an evenly divided Venezuelan electorate is confident that the election meets their democratic aspirations. The OAS and the EU have expressed similar views. And there are also outstanding allegations of voting irregularities raised by the opposition.

So the CNE's decision to declare Mr. Maduro the victor before completing a full recount is difficult to understand, and they did not explain their haste in taking this decision.

QUESTION: Sorry. You're still sticking with this line that Maduro called for a whole – a full recount?

MR. VENTRELL: My understanding is he did endorse that idea at one point yesterday. Now, where he eventually ended up throughout the day – but there was a moment where he endorsed the idea of a recount and said there was nothing to hide. So those were his words.

QUESTION: Okay. So what's your next step, or is there one?

MR. VENTRELL: We'll be absolutely in consultation with the OAS, the EU, regional partners, and we continue to believe that resolving the voting irregularities and the calls for a recount would do much to ensure that the Venezuelan people feel included in the process and that their democratic aspirations are being met. So --

QUESTION: So you still think that they should recount the votes?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, that's been our position. That hasn't happened.

QUESTION: No, no, even – no, after the vote has been certified, after the election's been certified, you still think that there should be a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, under the Venezuelan constitution, it's ultimately up to the CNE to certify the election results, which they've done.

QUESTION: Well, I understand that, but what's the U.S. position? Is the U.S. position that there still should be a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, our position is that --

QUESTION: Or the Venezuelan people have confidence --

MR. VENTRELL: Our position is that -- let me finish, Matt -- our position is that resolving these irregularities would have engendered more confidence in the Venezuelan people in the quality of this vote. And so that is the concern we've expressed. But in terms of where we go forward, I just don't have anything more for you today.

QUESTION: Well, okay. So are you prepared to congratulate Mr. Maduro on his victory?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not there.

QUESTION: Why? The vote has been certified. He has been elected. So either you say, "Okay, and we'll work with you," or, "try to work with you," or you say, "We don't think that you're the real winner," or, "We think that there is no winner because the vote hasn't been certified," so -- I mean, are you prepared to work with President Maduro, President-Elect Maduro?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we said we're prepared to work with whichever government comes out of this electoral process. Having said that, given what happened yesterday, we're consulting with key partners, the OAS, the EU, other regional neighbors as we examine this. We have -- the scenario is you have a deeply divided country, roughly evenly divided, and so we thought it was important to resolve some of these concerns, and that's why we're going to consult with some of our partners and concerned parties.

QUESTION: Well, do you -- so do you or do you not recognize the result, the certified result, as being reflective of the wishes of the Venezuelan people?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not making a judgment one way or another. This is a Venezuelan process under the Venezuelan constitution. The CNE does have this responsibility, but again, we've had our concerns, and many others, including the OAS and the EU, have had their concerns, too.

QUESTION: All right. Well, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil have all kind of -- have all accepted the Maduro -- Maduro's victory. These would seem to be -- at least Mexico and Colombia and to a certain extent Brazil -- would seem to be some of your top friends in this region. I just am not sure why -- when you reserve judgment, what are you reserving it for, because the vote's already been certified?

MR. VENTRELL: Look, we're just not there yet, Matt. Obviously, we have nearly half the country that had a different view. And so we'll continue to consult, but we're not there yet.

QUESTION: Do you have anything on – do you have anything to say about the violence that apparently – I think that several people were killed.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah. Let me be very clear on this. Violence has no place in a democratic electoral process, so we join in others in calling on all Venezuelans to refrain from violence at this time.

QUESTION: What about protests? There is a call for --

MR. VENTRELL: People, as we say in all countries, should be allowed to peacefully protest and make their views and their voices heard, but there's no place for violence.

QUESTION: And what – following all these questions of Matt, yesterday the Foreign Minister of Venezuela Jaua rejected the OAS position. He also rejected Spain's position. He said that Spain should care about their unemployment and not about what happened in Venezuela. These kind of comments that he's saying, I want to know – tomorrow there is a special session of the OAS – if the U.S. is going to present the case tomorrow in the permanent council tomorrow.

MR. VENTRELL: I don't have anything to preview about our activities at the OAS. As I said, we continue to consult, but I don't have anything to preview in terms of tomorrow's session one way or another.

QUESTION: But you are aware that there is high division in the OAS where Venezuela – it seems not to care about the OAS position, because they didn't care about what Insulza said proposing – following the Inter-American Charter, right, to recount the votes and have the democracy of Venezuela in high standard?

MR. VENTRELL: One of our concerns – and this is broadly shared and this is, I think, why the OAS Secretary General made the statement that he did is – we didn't have the kind of independent and respected international monitors that are common in so many other countries throughout the hemisphere. So that's part of the concern that we've expressed, and the OAS was clear too.

QUESTION: If the U.S. has to evaluate the democracy of Venezuela from 0 to 10, where do you put it in this moment?

MR. VENTRELL: We don't give grades from this podium, but thanks for the try.

April 15, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Deputy Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: What do you have to say about Mr. Maduro's election?

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for the question, Matt. So first of all, we congratulate the Venezuelan people for their broad participation in this electoral process. Given the extraordinary tightness of the result – around 1 percent of the votes cast separate the candidates – the opposition candidate, Henrique Capriles, and one member of the electoral council have called for a 100 percent audit or recount of the results. Governing party candidate Nicolas Maduro also welcomed the full recount. This appears an important, prudent, and necessary step to ensure that all Venezuelans have confidence in these results.

We note that the opposition has called for an investigation into allegations of irregularities. The results reveal the Venezuelan electorate that is roughly evenly divided. In order to meet all Venezuelans' democratic expectations, it makes sense that such a recount should be completed before any additional steps, including official certification of the results, occurs. So that's our position on --

QUESTION: Do you have any concerns about the way the election unfolded?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, this recount process is ongoing, so I don't it would be --

QUESTION: No, no, no, no. I mean, are you having concerns about alleged irregularities or fraud or anything like that?

MR. VENTRELL: While this recount process is going on, Matt, I don't have anything for you one way or the other. I will say that while our Embassy is very active in Caracas in terms of outreach to the Venezuela people, the Venezuelan authorities do not allow for the full type of observation that some other countries do. So I'm not sure we would have a characterization one way or another.

I will say that it appears that we had somewhere around 14 million voters, nearly 80 percent of the population. So really the context is you have very high voter turnout, you have broad participation, and so we do congratulate the Venezuelan people for their broad participation. But in terms of making any judgments about how the vote happened, we'll of course be in consultation with our regional partners and other interested parties, but I don't think we're going to characterize it one way or another.

QUESTION: Well, so – do you have any reason to believe that the votes that were cast, that it was a credible exercise?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, the recount process is going on, so let's let that process continue.

QUESTION: Well, that's -- we're not talking about the recount. We're talking about the actual initial vote.

MR. VENTRELL: Yeah.

QUESTION: Do you have any reason to believe that there were -- that it was problematic? You regularly comment on other elections about -- even when they do go to a recount. I mean, do you think that the recount is important simply because the vote is so close, or do you think that there might have been some funny business going on and that that's why the vote is so close?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, again, I noted that the opposition has called for an investigation of allegations and irregularities.

QUESTION: Yes, and --

MR. VENTRELL: And so we encourage that investigation to happen. And Matt, we also very much note the broad participation.

QUESTION: But you don't necessarily believe yourself that there were irregularities.

MR. VENTRELL: Again, let's let the recount go forward. We're not going to be making judgments one way or the other.

QUESTION: Can I just --

MR. VENTRELL: Shaun, go ahead, welcome back to the State Department. We haven't seen you in a while.

QUESTION: Yes. Just to follow-up on that, would the United States not accept the election results if there's not a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, you're -- that's a bit of a hypothetical. I mean, it looks like Mr. Maduro himself has said that he's welcomed a full a recount. So let's let the process play out a little bit here.

QUESTION: And just a follow-up: Has the United States been in contact with either party, with Mr. Maduro or Mr. Capriles, in the past --

MR. VENTRELL: I'm not sure if our Embassy has been in direct contact with either the parties here in this election. I mean, obviously throughout -- broadly speaking our Embassy has wide outreach to Venezuelan society, but I'm not sure about particular communication with the parties. This is working its way through the Venezuelan process.

QUESTION: Are you concerned about --

MR. VENTRELL: Go ahead, Elise.

QUESTION: -- there's a bit of a tense situation in the streets. There have been military tanks in the streets. And are you wonder -- are you concerned that if the election does not go the way of Maduro that the Chavistas may make trouble?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, this is sort of putting the cart ahead of the horse. We want the recount process to go ahead, and we're not going to make judgments one way or the other.

QUESTION: Well, it's a very tense situation on the streets is my point.

MR. VENTRELL: We obviously call for calm and urge calm and restraint. But right now where we are is it's working its way through the Venezuelan recount system and appropriate channels. So that's what we encourage.

Let's go to EFE in the back. Go ahead, Lucia.

QUESTION: Yes. Actually -- thank you -- actually the electoral national council has not said that there will be a recount. It's something that the opposition has asked for and Maduro has said that he's for an audit, which is a regular process that they do over there. But the electoral national council has not said anything on that, and actually they said today that they will announce Maduro as an official winner. So are you worried about that?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, it's our opinion that it makes sense that a recount should be completed before any additional steps, including official certification of the results, occur. So that's what we're urging at this time.

QUESTION: So would it be worrying if they announce Maduro as a winner without a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, I think I've stated as clear as I can that any -- the recount should be completed before any additional steps are taken. That's the U.S. position.

QUESTION: Well, does that mean that the legitimacy -- in your eyes, the legitimacy of the election will be compromised if the council goes ahead and certifies the vote before a recount?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, they haven't yet, so we're not there yet.

QUESTION: Well, yeah, but Patrick, this is one of those hypothetical questions that you're inconsistently choosing not to answer.

MR. VENTRELL: All right.

QUESTION: You wouldn't -- so it would be fine with you if they go ahead and do the recount -- don't do the recount before certifying. Is that what you're saying?

MR. VENTRELL: We're not going to be getting into hypotheticals. I mean, your hypothetical had like a triple negative in there. I'm not even sure I followed it. But the bottom line is --

QUESTION: Oh, okay. So if North Korea tests a nuclear device, there won't be any response from the U.S? That's a hypothetical.

MR. VENTRELL: Thanks for --

QUESTION: So why can you not answer? There's certainly -- you must have an opinion one way or the other. If you say that you think that it makes sense and there should be a recount before the vote is certified, surely you can say something about if there isn't a recount and the vote is certified.

MR. VENTRELL: I mean, we want --

QUESTION: Would that --

MR. VENTRELL: Matt --

QUESTION: -- be problematic for the United States?

MR. VENTRELL: Let me be very clear. We want the recount to happen.

QUESTION: Yes.

MR. VENTRELL: If it doesn't, then we'll address it at that time. We're not there yet. We're very clear that we want the recount to happen.

Go ahead.

QUESTION: Does Venezuela's comparative lack of oversight of their elections -- you said the -- your Embassy is involved, but they don't have this oversight. Does that give you any concern about the recount going forward?

MR. VENTRELL: Throughout the region, throughout the hemisphere, the inclusion of domestic and experienced international election observers like the OAS, the EU, and others, do help affirm a free and fair election process. We've wanted free and fair elections in Venezuela, but right now we're calling for a recount. We think that's what needs to happen.

QUESTION: If I could just check on something that you said --

MR. VENTRELL: Said.

QUESTION: -- if I may.

MR. VENTRELL: We're outside of your normal area of the world of interest, but I'm happy to take your question.

QUESTION: That's okay. I'm a man of the world, let's put it this way.

MR. VENTRELL: Okay.

QUESTION: Yeah. You said that you want the recount before the certification. Is there, like, a precedent where the recount happens before certification or after certification?

MR. VENTRELL: Historically speaking in Venezuela, or --

QUESTION: The way I understand it is that if you have certification, then it's a done deal, right?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I'm not familiar in the Venezuelan case exactly what the local electoral authorities' processes are. But before they certify, we have the opposition candidate and we have the governing party candidate who are less than 1 percent apart, and they're both agreeing that they're willing to have an audit of the vote. So we'd like that to go forward.

QUESTION: Hi. How are you? I'm sorry I am late, and I know that you already talked about Venezuela, but I would like to know if -- probably the OAS already spoke about the recount of votes in Venezuela. I was wondering if the U.S. is going to take a more strong position in that regard.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, I think we took a very strong position, which I already said here. I have not seen the OAS statement since I came down here. It must have been very recently. Maybe you were just receiving it as news moments ago.

QUESTION: But General Secretary Insulza, he said he's for a vote recount, so I wonder because the U.S. is also member of the OAS, so it's going to support this position, it is trying to get some support from other countries like showing more support for the democracy?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, I stated our position already. I haven't seen the OAS comments, one way or another.

QUESTION: But this could change the position of the U.S. or in that regard?

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we're certainly consulting with the OAS, with regional partners, with countries in the hemisphere about the situation, absolutely.

March 18, 2013

Victoria Nulan, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Maduro government has made claims that the U.S. is plotting to assassinate the opposition leader Capriles in order to blame it on the Maduro government. Your reaction to that? And secondly, has there been a request, as President Maduro said, for the U.S. to investigate this? And third, has there been any contact between State and former ambassadors Otto Reich and Roger Noriega in terms of working with the opposition?

MS. NULAND: Let me say it here extremely clearly, looking right at you: The United States categorically rejects allegations of any U.S. government involvement in any plots to destabilize the Venezuelan government or to harm anyone in Venezuela. With regard to our former ambassadors, they have spoken for themselves quite clearly.

QUESTION: Toria, just briefly – pardon me – the Maduro government has not made any requests, right, to investigate this one?

MS. NULAND: To my knowledge, there haven't been any requests that are viable in the – within the context of what I said earlier.

March 11, 2013

Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: We understand that the U.S. is declaring *persona non grata*, two employees here in Washington, in the embassy.

MS. NULAND: We are. In response to the Venezuelan Government's actions against two of our personnel, we did inform the Venezuelan Government on March 9th that, in accordance with Article 9 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and Article 23 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, that we had declared two of their second secretaries *persona non grata*. They are Orlando Jose Montanez Olivares and Consular Officer Victor Camacaro Mata. One was at the Embassy here in Washington and one was at the consulate in New York. And they have now departed the country.

QUESTION: Isn't it --

MS. NULAND: Anne.

QUESTION: -- personae non gratae, plural?

MS. NULAND: Correct. Thank you very much for correcting my Latin plurals there, Arshad, with your superior education. My mother will be extremely pleased that you got the Latin right. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't know. My dad's not a professor like yours.

So here's my question.

QUESTION: Why is it that you would have decided to -- a week ago or on, I believe, it was Wednesday night, a senior State Department official, I believe, was quoted as having said that you weren't planning on retaliating for the time being. Why wait until Saturday to do so?

MS. NULAND: Sometimes it takes us a while to evaluate what has gone down with our personnel and to decide on a response, and this -- in this case it did take us a couple of days to get to this decision, but this is the decision that we came to.

QUESTION: Was it at all related to former President Chavez's funeral and a desire not to sort of give him a poke in the eye before that?

MS. NULAND: I wouldn't look at it that way. I think it was a matter of working through who were appropriate people to ask to leave.

QUESTION: The President, in his statement on Tuesday, the day that Chavez's death was announced, stated clearly the United States interest in a more constructive relationship with Venezuela. One could regard the expulsion of your two military attaches as one of the sort of last acts of the *ancien* regime, right? I mean, that happened before the announcement of Chavez's death. And I wonder – I know that it is usually the case that you guys will choose to respond in a retaliatory and commensurate manner. But I wonder why it seemed necessary, in this case, when the President has made clear you're seeking a more constructive relationship, why this might not have been an occasion to turn the other cheek.

MS. NULAND: You'll recall that the timing of the expulsions was within hours of the announcement of Chavez's death. You'll also recall that in the day or days that followed, there was some pretty heated rhetoric coming in our direction. I think I called it at one point a page from the old Chavista playbook that we were hoping was going to change. So clearly, when you have an incident that you consider unjust, and then you need to take reciprocal action and make your point clear.

We've also said all the way through this, and we said it on Thursday-Friday, that we do hope for better relations with Venezuela. There is work that we would like to do together, particularly in the areas of counterterrorism, counternarcotics, economics and energy relations, but it's going to take a change of tone from Caracas.

QUESTION: But why does this necessarily advance your goal of better relations?

MS. NULAND: Arshad, around the world, when our people are thrown out unjustly, we're going to take reciprocal action. And we need to do that to protect our own people.

QUESTION: Was this a straight swap, so the same level of officials who were expelled from Caracas?

MS. NULAND: Well, I'll leave it to you to look. These were two second secretaries. Our guys were defense attaches.

QUESTION: So I think they were actually the same. And in that case, one wonders why it took four days to figure out who to expel.

MS. NULAND: Again, it sometimes takes some time to work these things out.

QUESTION: Why shouldn't this be seen as anything other than waiting until – I mean, it's not a bad thing to not want to derail or otherwise add complications to a head of state's funeral.

MS. NULAND: I think you're parsing this too finely.

March 7, 2013

Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Yes, on Venezuela. I was wondering if you've put together the delegation from the U.S. to the funeral of Mr. Chavez tomorrow. And also, yesterday a U.S. official said that the State Department was not ruling out the option of a reciprocal action after the expulsion of the two attaches. I was wondering if you have any conclusion on that.

MS. NULAND: On the second issue I don't have anything to announce here. The U.S. delegation to the funeral will include U.S. Representative William – former U.S. Representative William Delahunt, the Honorable U.S. Representative Gregory Meeks, and U.S. Embassy Caracas Chargé d'Affaires James Derham.

QUESTION: And, sorry, a follow-up. Why is there no one from the State Department or the White House attending?

MS. NULAND: James Derham, our Chargé, is a State Department career officer.

QUESTION: I was on yesterday's background call, and everybody, I think, really appreciated that. But there were a few questions that didn't come up. One was - there were a lot of questions about the extent to which officials in this building are communicating with Venezuelan Vice President Nicolas Maduro, but there weren't any questions about the extent to which officials in this building are communicating with the Venezuelan opposition. I was wondering if you could shed any light on that. Are we having meetings with anyone in the opposition, specifically Henrique Radonski, the – one of the challengers --

QUESTION: Capriles.

MS. NULAND: Guy, as you know, in the past, our Embassy in Caracas has maintained a broad cross-section of contacts. I don't have anything on contacts in the last 24 hours. As you can imagine, it's a period of some emotion and ferment in Caracas. But if there's anything to share with you on contacts with Capriles, we'll get back to you.

Yeah, still Venezuela? Go ahead. Can you tell me who you are, please?

QUESTION: Daniel Pacheco from Caracol Television, Colombia. Do you have any concerns about the security situation in Venezuela as the funeral arrangements are developing and as the transition goes on?

MS. NULAND: Well, I think that Venezuelan authorities themselves have called for calm. We would obviously support that. More broadly, let me simply say that with the passing of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela faces a number of important challenges. It's obviously – these days are a time of some emotion and discussion with his passing, and there are many vital decisions ahead.

Going forward, we believe that Venezuelan – that Venezuelans deserve the opportunity to choose their next leader democratically and to be assured that the institutions and processes of democratic governance are protected, most importantly well-functioning, independent branches of government, and a transparent and fair electoral system, and a vigorous and balanced protection of freedom of expression, and particularly a level playing field when they go to elections.

QUESTION: First, does the United States recognize Nicolas Maduro as the interim president of Venezuela at this point?

MS. NULAND: I understand, Guy, that the way this works is that the constitution of Venezuela requires that there be an election some 30 days out. I'm not going to parse the constitutional issues between now and then. What we're looking for is for the Venezuelan people to have the right to go to the polls and have a free, fair, transparent election, and that the playing field for all the candidates be level in the lead-up to that.

QUESTION: So is that a no?

MS. NULAND: I'm not sure that we've taken a position one way or the other on the issue that you raise.

QUESTION: Also, regarding the two U.S. Embassy officials that were ejected within hours of Mr. Chavez's passing, has anyone in this building categorically denied that those officials were actually meeting with members of the Venezuelan military?

MS. NULAND: We have categorically denied that they are guilty of any wrongdoing. I believe they're both Department of Defense employees, but we categorically deny that they were guilty of any wrongdoing whatsoever under Venezuelan law or anything else.

QUESTION: Do you believe that to be like an electioneering ploy by the Vice President?

MS. NULAND: I'm not going to speak to what the motives of the Venezuelan side were in this, but we're obviously disappointed by these false accusations levied against our Embassy officials. This is part of a tired playbook of alleging foreign interference as a political football in internal Venezuelan politics, and if we're going to get to a place that we can do better together, this kind of stuff has to stop.

QUESTION: Could you update us on the security situation --

MS. NULAND: Please.

QUESTION: -- on the ground in Caracas, what measures you might have taken to protect the Embassy?

MS. NULAND: Well, in these circumstances we always make sure that we've taken prudent precautions. We have done that in this case. But as you know, we don't talk about the details of our security posture.

QUESTION: Well, given how long Chavez had been sick, is there any legitimate reason to think that there would be any sort of repercussions against the U.S. or American interests in Venezuela?

MS. NULAND: Again, we've taken prudent precautions and we are joining others around the hemisphere in calling for calm at this period.

QUESTION:. Is U.S. taking any people-to-people new steps as far as after his death is concerned?

MS. NULAND: Well, we've obviously -- in the statement that the White House made yesterday, it was directed at the Venezuelan people. You know that we'd like to get to a place where we can improve our bilateral relationship. We believe that there is important work we can do together, particularly in confronting counternarcotics problems, tracking international terrorism, broadening our commercial relationship. But in order to get there, we have to get past the kind of zero-sum accusations against the United States that we've seen in the last couple of days.

QUESTION: And you believe that there will be a light at the end of the dark tunnel?

MS. NULAND: Well, again, we need to see how this proceeds in Venezuela.

March 5, 2013

Patrick Ventrell, Acting Spokesperson
Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela
Washington, DC

QUESTION: The Venezuelan Vice President just said that a U.S. diplomatic attache has been expelled for plotting against the government. Do you have any information on this?

MR. VENTRELL: I hadn't seen that. I did check in on Venezuela just before coming down here. I understand that the Vice President, Maduro, was speaking to the nation, but I didn't see the final content of what he said, so I'm not aware of that.

QUESTION: But you don't have anything on a U.S. diplomat being expelled from Venezuela?

MR. VENTRELL: Again, not since I came down here five minutes ago. If he said something further in his address, or – I'm not aware –

QUESTION: No, I'm not talking about – I'm just saying that the Vice President said it. I'm not asking you to respond to his comments. Do you have any information on whether this diplomat has been expelled or not?

MR. VENTRELL: I don't. I'll look into it afterward. You know where we are more broadly speaking on Venezuela, but –

QUESTION: No, I don't. Remind me.

MR. VENTRELL: Well, we have expressed sympathy for President Chavez's illness. Should he become permanently unavailable to serve, our understanding is that the Venezuelan constitution requires an election to select a new president, so the elections need to be free and fair, if they were to go forward and we are in that situation. But right now, we're not in a position where we've moved to that next step yet. So again, we express our sympathy for his illness, but I'm not aware of this particular case.

QUESTION: The reports overnight have suggested his health has actually deteriorated quite a bit.

MR. VENTRELL: I'd really refer you to the Government of Venezuela for more information on that.

QUESTION: You don't have anything independently, a source --

MR. VENTRELL: I don't have an update.

February 21, 2013

Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson

Daily Press Briefing, Selections on Venezuela

Washington, DC

QUESTION: Your comments from a couple days ago seemed to kick up a storm with the Venezuelan Government describing them as rude, and I think causing the indignation of all Venezuelans. Do you still believe that incapacity of President Chavez would demand new elections under the Venezuelan constitution?

MS. NULAND: Well, Brad, thank you for the opportunity to address this again. Venezuela's future has to be decided by the Venezuelan people. I think what I said got blown out of proportion there. The only point I was trying to make was the following: Should President Chavez become permanently unavailable to serve, the Venezuelan constitution, at that moment, requires an election to select a new president. If those conditions come to apply, we hope that the Venezuelan constitution will be respected.

QUESTION: So you don't see – this is your own constitutional analysis that this Department's made? Not – because it seems that that's not shared by the Venezuelan Government. Or the fact that you're talking about it is not appreciated maybe.

MS. NULAND: No, I think – again, we're simply stating our understanding of what Venezuela's own constitution has to say. That's a different matter than the question of whether the president's able to serve out his term.